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# Mao Zedong's "Anarcho-Marxist" Vision Revisited\*

By Caleb Yankus

Seminar Paper  
Presented to the Department of History  
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HST 499: Prof. Max Geier & Prof. Narasingha Sil

## I

In 1949, after a brutal civil war, China was unified under a new party and a new political leader. Mao Zedong (1893-1976) had navigated a treacherous political landscape to emerge as the leader of the Chinese Communist Party, CCP, and the figurehead of the entire Chinese nation. His rise to power was based on a political philosophy that was shaped by experiences from his youth and growing to adulthood in a time of upheaval and change in China. While several scholars have tried to explain Mao in terms of his Marxist orientation, the concept of “Maoism”<sup>1</sup> shows that unlike some of his Communist contemporaries Mao’s ideals were a synthesis of traditional Chinese thought, shrewd pragmatism, and Marxist ideas.

Mao’s unique approach to Marxist theory began with the traditional ideals he imbibed since his childhood. This upbringing let him see that a successful revolution in China must start with the peasants. Such a revolutionary strategy would isolate him from the Russian Communists. After joining with the Kuomintang, a powerful political party, Mao and his followers later separated from them over ideological differences. Mao had a unique approach to Marxism that was shaped during the first half of the twentieth century.

Mao had a rather uneventful life as the son of a moderately well-to-do peasant in Hunan. From his birth, until he was seventeen, he lived as all peasants did, attending a primary school where he was taught traditional Chinese values, but he began to argue with his father over the latter’s treatment of his peasant laborers. These early values would become important in the creation of his political philosophy, despite the fact that he would view traditional Confucianism as authoritarian. He would also know intimately the experiences of the suffering of peasants on a daily basis. By the time he left home in

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<sup>1</sup> Arif Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 7.

1910, he internalized “the basics—poverty, oppression, the generosity of a mother, and the gentleness of his native land, which he never forgot.”<sup>2</sup>

After leaving his home with nothing but his shoes and a small bundle of possessions, Mao went on to the city of Changsha. He tried to further in his studies at a higher primary school and then in a commercial school, but finally decided to work in a library where he began to read some revolutionary writings and for some political ideals. His education was delayed in 1911 when he ended up joining the Republican revolutionary army for six months where he witnessed the fall of the Qing dynasty.<sup>3</sup> Returning to his studies, he tried several different schools before he finally settled into the First Provincial Normal School of Hunan, where the real development of his political theory began.<sup>4</sup>

At the age of twenty, he was working in the library at the Normal School, when new theories about the appropriate execution of a revolution and new political strategies began to be heavily discussed in educational circles. Dissatisfaction with the way things had gone since the 1911 Revolution were now inspiring intellectuals to find a better political theory and governing process. It was in this period that Mao began to do heavy reading into political theory, both traditional and contemporary, though it is unclear whether he came into contact with modern Western theories at this point the general consensus is that he did not.<sup>5</sup>

As opposed to many of his contemporary political thinkers, Mao did not leave China to get his education, or to further it.<sup>6</sup> In 1918, he left Hunan and journeyed to Beijing where he would come into contact with Marxist writings and ideology. Here with his comrades he would eventually witness the

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<sup>2</sup> Alain Bouc, *Mao Tse-tung*, trans. Paul Auster and Lydia Davis (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 5.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the Revolution of 1911, see Edward J. Dingle, *China's Revolution 1911-1912* (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Bouc, *Mao*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Borthwick, *Pacific Century: The Emergence of Modern Pacific Asia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 181.

formation of the Chinese Communist Party. This group of Chinese intellectuals and idealists would begin the task of bringing a revolution to China.

## II

Chinese political thought has been influenced by several traditional ideologies, one of which, Confucianism, would have a profound effect on the way that Mao, and his contemporaries, created political theory. Marxist Communism has dominated the twentieth century political landscape of China. However, to be successfully integrated into China, Marxism has had a significant infusion of Chinese philosophy. Though unlike Marxism, Confucianism is generally thought of as a religious philosophy, “it exercised profound influence on Chinese political, social, and cultural life historically.”<sup>7</sup>

Confucius (551-479 BCE) focused on the order of relationships and a social hierarchy that allowed for a high degree of personal control. His goal was to influence the behavior of all people through education which would then make them virtuous people. These virtuous people would then make all decisions based on their moral correctness and make it so that the government did not have to make any coercive laws. Confucianism stressed order and control, and through this made it the duty and responsibility of each individual to do their part in maintaining that order.<sup>8</sup>

Confucius envisioned a society that did everything for the good of the society and on a morally correct path, which led to an existence without the need of corporal devices. Confucius had to be careful because he worked very closely with the kingdoms of what is now China, but his ideas promoted a utopian society where the government would not be needed. This gives the first recognition of the value that Chinese intellectuals put into Anarchism; not the type that destroyed governments, but the type that had no need of them.

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<sup>7</sup> Narasingha Sil, interviewed by author, June 2, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1991) 171.

The Confucian concept of *Datong* (Great Unity) provided the Chinese intellectuals who were being educated in Europe, mainly France, and Japan at the turn of the twentieth century the intellectual base on which to ground anarchist visions of an ideal human society.<sup>9</sup> They studied Western philosophies such as anarchism and Marxism. Chinese intellectuals overseas not only studied these powerful European philosophies, but also brought numerous books on the subjects back home (like the intellectuals of Czarist Russia, studying in France or Switzerland, had done a century earlier).

The influx of Chinese intellectuals returning from study abroad generated a huge drive toward utopian Anarchism in intellectual circles.<sup>10</sup> The idea of a society that did not need to be governed was ingrained in each of the philosophies that dominated intrinsic values of Chinese idealism, when contact with the West was first made. These ideals clashed “with Western ideas and practices of capitalism and industrialism that were being imposed on Imperial China in the latter half of the nineteenth century.”<sup>11</sup>

This sudden invasion of conflicting foreign ideals led to some confusion among varying groups within China. The Qing Dynasty was unable to stem the tide of foreign influence in their government and allowed much of the industry of the country to fall into the hands of foreigners. Rebellions began and ended throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, though none was bloodier than the Taiping Rebellion (1851-62) which was a striking example of synthesis between Chinese traditionalism and Western ideals.<sup>12</sup>

The Taiping Rebellion hybridized Christianity with traditional Chinese thinking. The Taipings established “The Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace” following Taoist writings, along with the concept of immortality which leant itself to combination with Christianity.<sup>13</sup> Taoism focuses on a connection with the cosmos through emotional and spiritual energy which was very easily attached to the Christian theology. From Confucianism came purity of the body and order based upon the education of the

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<sup>9</sup> Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 57.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Sil, interview, June 2, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> For a succinct account of The Taiping Rebellion see Narasingha P. Sii, “China’s Taiping Rebellion” in *Great Events from History: The 19<sup>th</sup> Century (1801-1900)*, ed. John Powell (Pasadena: Salem Press, 2007) 836-9.

<sup>13</sup> Huston, *Religions*, 205.

individual. One of the most important advances that the leaders of the rebellion made was to extend all of these rights to women, which generated an egalitarian society. While the Taipings were eventually crushed their example served as a guide for later rebellions.<sup>14</sup>

Mao was greatly influenced by this particular event in history. The Taiping Rebellion was dominant in his home province of Hunan. Stories were still told of Hong Xuiquan (1814-64) and his rebellion against the Qing Dynasty. Two important Taiping concepts appear to have a profound impact on Mao. The first was that the rebellion was launched by mostly poor peasants against the Imperial rule. The second was the amalgam of traditional Chinese philosophy and a Western Christian Weltanschauung producing an easily understood and effective base for “political and cultural transformation engineered from above, especially by a charismatic leader.”<sup>15</sup>

### III

With the advancement of the industries in the nineteenth century the Western nations were now pushing even further into other areas of the world looking for resources. England had acquired holdings in India, Africa, and trading rights China, which had allowed it to gain access to a variety of spices, dyes, clothing, and opium. Other Western countries were following suit and trying to industrialize their colonies to these nations that were at the mercy of Western military and ideology. From this period rose a reaction, socialism, to industrialism, imperialism, and capitalism which would quickly influence not only the mother countries but also these conquered nations.

When Karl Marx (1818-81), with the help of Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), published *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), it was a commentary on the future of the West. This was not just reactionary socialism, though; it was a scientific approach to the evolution of politics in Europe. Industrialization, imperialism, and capitalism had led to a huge stratification of classes in Europe and

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<sup>14</sup> Conrad Schirokauer, *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed (New York: Thomson Learning Inc, 1989), 401-402.

<sup>15</sup> Sil, interview, June 2, 2009.

widespread poverty in a society that was becoming more urban. The idea of communism struck a chord with the educated and bored who were looking to pull apart archaic monarchies and fight the rising tide of a capitalist society.

Within twenty years of the publication of the *Manifesto*, almost every European country witnessed the rise of some form of Marxist political grouping. The effects of these parties or groups were drastic changes along political lines in some countries, such as labor party organization, political violence, and in the case of Russia, eventual revolution. Europe at this time was dividing up the globe, and these ideals were spreading with the conquerors into countries across the world. By the best estimate Marx's work, in some form, ended up in the Beijing University Library around 1905, and thus began China's exposure to Marxism.

One of the Chinese intellectuals who would come into contact with the *Manifesto* and other Marxist documents early on was Li Dazhao (1888-1927). While working in the Beijing library he had come into contact with Western anarchist writing which was popular at the time. His exposure to the Marxist ideals was taken less for its leading and direction into Communism and more for its possibility of reinforcing anarchist ideals and movements. The concept of an egalitarian society where each individual focused on the health of the whole society made Marx's arguments mesh well with the utopian ideals of Confucianism. Also, Marx had a direct critique of the Western influences which were being exacted upon China.<sup>16</sup> Li began to publish articles on Marx and Engels as early as 1907, aligning the views of the *Manifesto* with the anti-Qing anarchist movement.<sup>17</sup>

Another intellectual Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) returned to China in 1908 after have studied for seven years in Japan. During his studies not only had he been exposed to the rapid industrialization and the astounding power which was demonstrated in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), but also to the anarchist movement that had been growing in that country. Upon his return Chen began to teach at

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<sup>16</sup> Dirlik, *Marxism*, 54.

<sup>17</sup> Dirlik, *Anarchism*, 72.



University of Beijing where he came into contact with Li. Chen was very critical of the Qing Dynasty, and like Li found the Marxist critique of monarchies to be an intriguing one. From this they formed a working relationship which developed into camaraderie as they developed political theories and philosophies.<sup>18</sup>

Li and Chen were two of the main contributors to the anarchist movement which surrounded the beginnings of Chinese Marxism. Since the political progression in the years up until the May Fourth Movement were filled with a wandering from the combination of anarchist ideals, including many from Confucianism, and ideas gleaned from Marx and Engels. In fact, up until the May Fourth Movement, the work of Li, Chen, and their contemporaries could hardly be considered a unified political movement.<sup>19</sup> However, this is not to say that the study of Marxist ideas was not alive and well within China, many study groups had developed around the university campus to study communist works making the University of Beijing “a hotbed of radicalism.”<sup>20</sup> These groups, however, were not specific studies of pure Marxist theory, but rather ways to apply these theories to the current Anarchist movement.

Li and Chen began with the already flourishing Anarchist movement that wanted to do away with the Qing Dynasty. This movement was already causing problems in China with the use of explosives and assassination as its political weaponry. The problem was that the lack of unity within the Anarchist movement made progress improbable which left the public wondering about its goals.<sup>21</sup> There was no unified leadership for the movement and that was something that Li and Chen commented on in their publications. Many of the writings of the two focused around the utopian ideals found in Confucianism and in Marx’s writings. They focused on developing a unified strategy to bring China out of its Imperial domination and into the utopian society that had always been the goal of Chinese intellectuals since Confucius. Their main points had to do with the eventual disappearance of

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<sup>18</sup> Arif Dirlik, *Origins of Chinese Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 13.

<sup>19</sup> Dirlik, *Anarchism*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Narasingha Sil, interviewed by author, May 7, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Dirlik, *Anarchism*, 126.

government and the creation of a society that functioned based on the will of the people.<sup>22</sup> On these points Marx and Engels seem to be a perfect fit, which made the creation of anarcho-communist ideals inevitable in China.

These particular idea that were being cultivated by Li, and then reinforced by Chen who was teaching at the University of Beijing at the time, created a duplicity to the Anarchist movement. Marxism was based on fighting the establish flaws within a Western government, and while those flaws may be inherent in all government, the Chinese government was faced with more than just the standard problems. The Qing Dynasty had found itself dominated by foreign powers; most of the industry that had been developed in the country belonged to those powers, while at the same time they had a huge population of rural peasants that had nothing to do with industry. Much like Russia before them they were caught in the middle of two ages: one feudal, one modern.<sup>23</sup>

This led to stratification between the nobility and the lower classes, while the educated felt themselves to be the representatives of the lower classes. Unlike Russia, however, there was not the familiarity with nations that had gone through democratic change and restructuring like there was in the West, therefore the easiest models to follow were those of traditional Confucian Utopian.<sup>24</sup> This led to a large contingent of students and teachers accepting anarchy as a valid solution for the replacement of the government.

As Anarchist groups became more radicalized and more active the Qing Dynasty found itself being the victim of assassination and social upheaval. Though the Anarchists were never able to mount anything close to a successful revolution they played a major role in the eventual end of the monarchy. The distinct lack of success within the Anarchist movement was mostly based on the lack of organization that is inherent in all movements of the type. After the Qing Dynasty was dissolved in 1911, there was a

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<sup>22</sup> Dirlik, *Anarchism*, 77.

<sup>23</sup> Borthwick, 53.

<sup>24</sup> Dirlik, *Anarchism*, 57.

more focused study of Marxist ideas. This and the success of the Bolshevik Revolution gave way to the conversion to a more Western idea of Communism beginning in China.<sup>25</sup>

Through all of this until the success of the Bolshevik Revolution, Mao was involved with this movement only through letters from the Normal School to Beijing which was why he joined the revolutionary army. Mao was getting only small pieces of the full manuscripts that were going to be so vital in the cultivation of a new Marxist theory. Even in the stages where they were almost purely Anarchist, the three men realized that a revolution in China could not happen with merely the proletariat, since the Chinese workers represented such a minority of the total population.<sup>26</sup> They understood that the people who would be most dissatisfied with the current state of the government would be the peasants who were starving, at the same time they would also be the most hungry for knowledge and improvement in their daily lives. This theory would be temporarily put on hold in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution, but never disappear from Mao's mind.<sup>27</sup>

#### IV

With the success of the Bolshevik Revolution there was a broader call for social interaction around the theme of Marxist thinking. The first official study groups of Marxist theory had begun much earlier, but now these were being overrun by students looking to delve into the possibilities Marx offered.<sup>28</sup> Many of these groups including several that had been started by Li and Chen were formerly Anarchist groups looking for a new ideal to follow. Chen brought his publication *New Youth*, and Li founded the New Tide Society, a group that focused on the study of Marxism in the hopes of generating political change and theory,<sup>29</sup> both of which were products of the new interest in Marxism. These

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>26</sup> Dirlik, *Anarchism*, 143.

<sup>27</sup> Nick Knight, *Rethinking Mao: Explorations in Mao Zedong's Thought* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), 199.

<sup>28</sup> Borthwick, *Pacific*, 185.

<sup>29</sup> Sil, interview, May 14, 2009.

societal tools would become involved with the Communist International, or Comintern, out of Moscow, and soon China had its own representative living in Beijing.

This is when Mao arrived in Beijing to meet with Li and Chen. The two had already formed a society for the study of Marx, the Marxist Research Society, which Mao quickly joined. From this the next year was spent sorting out the theories from the realistic successes of the Bolshevik Revolution. The failure of the Anarchist movements to manufacture any real change led Li and Chen as former Anarchist leaders to reevaluate their revolutionary standpoint, while Mao was now in a location with many more resources than his home. Within the first year they had organized a much more effective society of students and had begun work on a greater plan for revolution.<sup>30</sup>

The following year, in 1919, the May Fourth Movement occurred. This was the first success of the Chinese nationalists at organizing a widespread and effective demonstration to the current political system. The demonstrations were a reaction to the weak actions taken on the part of the Chinese in the Versailles Treaty, which many hoped would return some of the German possessions to China. Instead those holdings were given to Japan and no actions were taken against Japan regarding some previous wrongs to China. From the original demonstration of three thousand students the movement then mushroomed into a full blown nationalist movement.<sup>31</sup>

After the initial demonstration all of the students in Beijing went on strike, demonstrating in the streets. They demanded the resignation of the three officials who had been involved with the Versailles Treaty and burned one home down. Students were then arrested and on that note public opinion turned against the government as the movement began to involve not only students, but workers too. In June the movement had spread all the way to Shanghai where students, workers, and peasants began to support the Beijing cause. To Mao and his contemporaries this was the first real example of

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<sup>30</sup> Arif Dirlik, *Marxism*, 65.

<sup>31</sup> Borthwick, *Pacific*, 173.

organized success for a Marxist movement, though Mao still believed that a true revolution would begin with the peasantry.<sup>32</sup>

Over the next two years many of the Marxist societies began to unite forming larger societies and having more influence on both campuses and cities. Seeing the success that the student societies of China were having, the Comintern decided to become involved in Beijing and Shanghai in 1920. From the involvement of the Russians in the development of Chinese Communism there is a definitive stifling traditional Chinese values from the political theory. This would last until the mid-1930s when failure after failure would separate the Communist party and allow Mao's voice to become fully heard.<sup>33</sup> It is important, however to discuss the failures and developments of those interim years.

At the first meeting of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Shanghai (July 1921) Li and Chen were named cofounders of the CCP with Chen as the first General Secretary. Mao attended this meeting, but at the time he was not given a position. The party elected Sun Yat-sen as their first leader and who urged the members to work closely with the Comintern to ensure success.<sup>34</sup> This set the tone for the next decade of CCP activity.

Since the fall of the Qing Dynasty, China had been in the hands of powerful warlords despite the attempt at a republic. This had divided the land much like it had been in the Warring States Period, but one party seemed to have a good foothold on the task of reuniting China. The Kuomintang, or KMT, was the Nationalist party headed by Chiang Kai-shek, who had allied himself with some powerful warlords and some underworld strongmen to consolidate China. Since the KMT was the strongest party in China

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<sup>32</sup> Mao Zedong, *A Single Spark can Start a Prairie Fire* (January 5, 1930) in *The Wisdom of Mao* (New York: Citadel Press, 1968), 4.

<sup>33</sup> Mary C. Wright, "Modern China in Transition, 1900-1950," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* vol. 321 (1959): 3.

<sup>34</sup> Sil, interview, May 14, 2009.

at the time the Comintern decided that the CCP should ally itself with this party. Many of the leaders of the CCP were against this, but under pressure from Russia they gave in.<sup>35</sup>

The CCP was strong in Shanghai and Beijing which worked well with Chiang's plans since they were two of the major cities in China. The parties officially allied in late 1923, and at the First Party Congress in January of 1924, the Kuomintang found themselves with CCP members as alternate members of the Central Executive Committee, including Mao.<sup>36</sup> With this unification the military consolidation of China by the KMT could get under way, with the help of the CCP who were creating uprisings against both warlords and landlords in major areas the alliance seemed to be working.

During this period the KMT used the CCP to pull support from local government and then came in to mop up the crumbling social situation. Chiang was more focused on cities which allowed for the CCP to deal almost exclusively with the workers instead of the peasants. A few members, however, continued to focus on the peasants, these were people like Li and Mao. As the CCP began to have more and more success in their stirring of rebellion things also became more violent. In 1926 Chiang purged some of the CCP members from the alliance, which angered the other members, but at the time they were engaged in the Northern Expedition (1926-7), and in order for the campaign to succeed the parties put the incident behind them.<sup>37</sup>

## V

Late in 1927, the violent tendencies of the CCPs uprisings caused a bloody massacre in Nanjing. More importantly, the massacre was not contained to warlords and landlords, but spilled over into the British and American embassies. This caused both of these countries to retaliate and their ships began bombarding the city. Kai-shek took this opportunity to strike back against the Communists, by starting a massive and bloody purge of all CCP members in the KMT. These actions would permanently separate

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<sup>35</sup> Robert E Bedeski, "The Evolution of the Modern State in China: Nationalist and Communist Continuities," *World Politics* vol. 27, no. 4 (1975) 547.

<sup>36</sup> Sil, interview, May 14, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Borthwick, Pacific, 183.

the CCP from the KMT and Communist and Nationalist would look at each other as enemies, from this point forward there would be no chance for reconciliation.<sup>38</sup>

The purge of the Communists from the Kuomintang occurred at roughly the same time as Stalin's victory over Trotsky in Russia. From this came a new wave of Russian leadership into the CCP that was focused on Stalin's goals. During the purge by the KMT, Li was killed which left no balance against the Russian ideal of a proletariat uprising. The leadership of the CCP would now focus on the creating a revolution that modeled the Bolshevik one, which would have extremely limited success.<sup>39</sup>

After the purge the CCP, split into several splinter groups which would each have its own agenda for accomplishing the goals of revolution. Most would just struggle to survive, but others met with very real success. One such group was in the Jiangxi province where Chu Teh (1886-1976) was leading a successful campaign against the KMT. Here he was joined by Mao and together they were able to organize workers, students, and peasants into not only a successful army, but the beginnings of a political state. This met with harsh criticism from the new Stalinist leadership, because the uprising was composed primarily of peasants, which were not part of the proletariat the CCP leadership wanted to use.<sup>40</sup>

By 1930, Southern China had several groups which were working for the cause. Some of these groups were meeting with the approval of the CCP leadership, others, like the Chu-Mao coalition, were not. On this political landscape is where Mao true thinking about successful Marxism in china would begin to be voiced. In January of this year Mao would write and publish *A Single Spark can Start a Prairie Fire*, which chided the central leadership of the CCP for approving of some guerilla groups, but not his. Furthermore, he begins to weave his Marxists ideals in with the traditional Chinese thought by

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<sup>38</sup> Bedeski, "Evolution," 548.

<sup>39</sup> Dirlik, *Marxism*, 47.

<sup>40</sup> Sil, interview, May 14, 2009.

using an old Chinese saying as both the title and the guiding principal of his work.<sup>41</sup> This work would have not only been understood in its Marxist term by the leadership of the CCP, but also would have relational value to the peasants.

The struggle of many groups in Southern China along with the success of Chu and Mao caused the CCP to call a party congress in May of 1930. At this congress leaders like Mao were chided for elevating the peasants above the workers in leadership of the revolution. Li Lisan, the leader of the CCP at the time, was a hardcore Stalinist and focused on creating a revolution in the metropolitan areas, unfortunately his attempts would fail in Changsha and Wu-Han, which would lead to his replacement as leader by other Stalinist students.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the decision at the CCP congress, Chu and Mao continued to believe that the peasants were the heart of the revolution. They continued their work in Jiangxi using the peasantry as their main revolutionary force. Mao quickly rose to become the leader of this coalition and in 1931 he became the chairman of a declared Soviet Republic. His quick success won over some of the hard line Stalinists, and very soon he had a strong organized system which was fully mobilized as a propaganda and military machine. This success came at the same time that Chiang Kai-shek was taking another shot at annihilating the CCP and with Japan entering Manchuria as conquerors.<sup>43</sup>

Toward the end of 1931 the CCP held another congress in Jiangxi and at this conference more support was given to Mao. Many things were discussed at this conference, but one of the most likely events to be discussed was the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, for shortly after the conference ended Mao's Chinese Soviet Republic declared war on Japan.<sup>44</sup> Also, a strategy for the expansion of the territory of the Republic was most likely discussed. Mao's specific thoughts on how best to prosecute

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<sup>41</sup> Mao, *Spark*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Sil, interview, May 19, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Bouc, *Mao*, 72.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



such organization and gain the trust of the people would later be related at the Second National Congress of Workers' and Peasants' Representatives in 1934 in his speech.

Mao's speech stressed the basic needs of both the peasants and the workers. Food, clothing, and shelter were given more importance than high ideology. Along with this he focused on the redistribution of land and the fairness of wages which had been staples of the Russian movement. These words were a message to the representative that the CCP was concerned "all the practical problems in the masses' everyday life".<sup>45</sup> This would be taken back to the varying district of the new soviet republic in hopes of inspiring a nationalist fervor and backing for the communist cause.

By the end of 1934, Chiang Kai-shek had managed to break down the defenses of the Communists in Jiangxi and from there the communists were in full retreat. This became known as the Long March, which ended in Shanxi. By this time Mao had gained full control of the main body CCP, even though there were to be some internal conflicts, he maintained a majority control.<sup>46</sup> While on this march the CCP would issue a statement called *Appeal to Fellow Countrymen Concerning Resistance to Japan and National Salvation*. This statement would ask the people to unite against the Japanese invaders instead of engaging in useless infighting against the CCP. This awoke a deep seeded nationalist wave through Peking and the resulting movements would wake the rest of the nation.<sup>47</sup>

This eventually led to the Sian Incident of 1936, where Chiang Kai-shek would be abducted by his own generals who pressured him to accept Communist offers of peace in the hopes of fighting Japan. After much persuasion Kai-shek agreed to the cessation of hostilities between the KMT and CCP. This allowed them to focus all of their power on Japan though the agreement would last for only a brief

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<sup>45</sup> Mao Zedong, *Be Concerned with the Well-Being of the Masses, Pay Attention to Methods of Work* (January 5, 1930) in *The Wisdom of Mao* (New York: Citadel Press, 1968), 9.

<sup>46</sup> Bouc, *Mao*, 72.

<sup>47</sup> SII, interview, May 21, 2009.

period it would represent a huge victory for the Communists in the eyes of nation that was looking for a government interested in the concerns of the masses.<sup>48</sup>

## VI

By 1937, when the Sino-Japanese War broke out, Mao had succeeded in the spreading of Marxist ideals to the masses, but still had not been able to create a sustained movement toward revolution. The hard line Stalinists were still angry with his elevation of the peasantry over the workers. This would be the first step in his alienation which he would deepen with two works that he released in 1937. These two works *On Practice* and *On Contradiction*, originally delivered as lectures, would clarify Mao's vision of the future which would attempt to combine Marxist theory with Chinese traditional society. The resulting two visions show a path that begins the change in the Marxist philosophy of Chinese Communism and the true face of what would become Maoism.

*On Practice* was a lecture delivered to students to explain the method by which they must understand Marxist and Communist theory. Mao points to the idea that knowledge without action means nothing, thus the difference between "knowing and doing."<sup>49</sup> This meant that the revolutionary movement was not going to be perfect at first. It had already gone through the stages of anarchism, and an initial revolutionary movement to depose the monarchy, but the revolution was far from finished, there were still many stages to come. This related very closely to the stages in the *Manifesto* and a literal translation of Marx, but Mao would focus on both the peasants and the workers instead of just the latter.<sup>50</sup> To relate this idea to students of every back ground he explains the concept using analogies both from the contemporary politics and from a Chinese history. Mao also inserts several proverbs and sayings that would have been understood by even those with a peasant's education.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Stephen G. Craft, "Opponents of Appeasement: Western-Educated Chinese Diplomats and Intellectuals and Sino-Japanese Relations, 1932-37," *Modern Asian Studies* vol. 35, no. 1 (2001): 212.

<sup>49</sup> Mao Zedong, *On Practice* (July 1937), in *The Wisdom of Mao* (New York: Citadel Press, 1968), 25.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>51</sup> Nick Knight, *Rethinking*, 143.

Mao, having come from a peasant background himself, was very keen on developing an egalitarian society, in the style of Confucius. His teaching concept was one of experience and he believed that the failed endeavors that the CCP had gone to up to 1937 were teaching him and the other party members how to make a better revolution. From this students may have gained more trust, as well as, confidence in a movement that was as open as to its goals. Couple this with the Communist focus on ridding China of the invading Japan and the Communist party seemed to have a greater stake in the nation, than that of the Nationalists.<sup>52</sup>

*On Contradiction* further describes the Mao's ideals for the advancement of Communism. This time he begins with a Taoist principle the "unity of opposites," which he borrowed from the Taipings, then follows with a quote from Lenin<sup>53</sup> and throughout uses the Russian revolutionary's words to give a Marxist twist to his writing. This gives it credibility as Marxist theory which is how many experts view this particular work in Mao's portfolio.<sup>54</sup> This document best demonstrates the beginning of Mao's "sinification" of Marxist theory into a hybridized ideal that would be understood by any Chinese citizen.

Mao uses the concept of the Taoist *Yin-yang* to demonstrate contradictions in relationship between all things. These contradictions are an integral part of Mao's view of the universe that incorporated the capitalist extremes with the Marxist ones. Since traditional Marxism was a reaction to capitalism and Chinese capitalist development was not anywhere near that of the West, the Chinese brand of Marxism had to be seen as a reaction to the feudal system that was oppressing the peasants. This was the same split that had separated the CCP from the Russian Marxists.

In *On Contradiction*, Mao uses a concept that involves the "constant flux"<sup>55</sup> of contradictions that eventually ended in the Anarchist utopia presented by Li Dazhao. Mao does not give any one contradiction priority over the other, but bases his assessment of the appropriate actions, such as

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<sup>52</sup> Dirlik, *Marxism*, 95.

<sup>53</sup> Mao Zedong, *On Contradiction* (August, 1937), in *The Wisdom of Mao* (New York: Citadel Press, 1968), 43.

<sup>54</sup> Dirlik, *Marxism*, 86.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

revolution and fully developed communism, on the current state of China. He juxtaposes this against the Westernizing influence of KMT and points to the betrayal that China has suffered at the hands of the West. His revolution is explained as a natural reaction to KMT who are just propagating the same ideals that China needs to be freed from. From this it is apparent that there is no room for both the KMT and the CCP in China and that he views the coming of Marxism to China as part of the natural social process that creates a relational theory in order to balance the world. The epitome of this balance is a world where there is no government and the people relate to each other in perfect balance, this is the ideology of Chinese Communism.<sup>56</sup>

## VII

The KMT and the CCP worked side by side in relatively good fashion for the first year of the conflict with Japan. The Communist army, known as the Eighth Route Army, had many successes in using its guerilla tactics against the Japanese forces. However, with each territory that came into contact with the Communist army there came more converts to the cause of the CCP. By the middle of 1939 this was a fact that weighed heavily on Chiang Kai-shek, who saw the Communists once again as the bigger threat. Mao's ideology was making headway with the peasants and since they were the largest group of recruits for the Nationalist army, this worried Kai-shek.<sup>57</sup>

Minor scuffles between armed bands of KMT and CCP soldiers were common place from 1939 until the large flash in 1941 when Nationalist troops attacked and annihilated the Communist Fourth Army. From this point on the armies were not longer on agreeable terms. When America entered World War II, there was a brief discussion with Kai-shek about arming the Communists with American weapons in order to help deal with the Japanese. He balked at the idea and instead gathered the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>57</sup> Borthwick, *Pacific*, 369.

American aid for himself.<sup>58</sup> This became a major point of contestation in CCP propaganda that Kai-shek would rather see his country destroyed by foreign invaders than think about helping the CCP who the people's best interest in mind.

By 1943, the Communist Army was both actively resisting the Japanese efforts to push further into China and holding their ground against Nationalist troops. Their ability to fight battle in guerilla style on both fronts made them more popular with the people especially as they welcomed refugees from Japanese occupied territories. To both the Americans and Kai-shek the success that the Communist forces were having represented trouble. In late 1943, American advisors felt that they needed to negotiate some sort of peace between the two parties otherwise there would be an all out civil war after hostilities with Japan ceased. Kai-shek agreed to this as early as 1944, but the offers fell on deaf ears, after years of dealing with Nationalist attacks, the Communists now had a strong foothold from which to fight.<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, to the grudge that members of the CCP bore against the KMT, there was also a new ideological difference between the two. The idea of unifying the country had always been in the minds of both parties, but after Mao put forward the concepts in his essay "On New Democracy," there was no halfway point for either a Western Marxist or a Nationalist to fall into. The CCP was now fully devoted to a Chinese Communist movement that was built on the backs of peasantry, for the purpose of unifying them with workers and pushing to "Mao's utopia."<sup>60</sup>

## VIII

Mao's article "On New Democracy" appeared in the inaugural issue of *Chinese Culture* in January 1940. This essay very simply laid out the plan for the future of the Communist party and what Mao imagined would be the steps that this process would take. One could say that it was the last in a series

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<sup>58</sup> Gunagqiu Xu, "The Issue of US Air Support for China during the Second World War, 1942-1945," *The Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2001): 459.

<sup>59</sup> Borthwick, *Pacific*, 370.

<sup>60</sup> Dirlik, *Marxism*, 95.

of works that began with *On Practice* and *On Contradiction*. The former of which was the caution as to what it would take for a revolution and that failures would happen. The latter was the answer to the questions of why Marxism and Communism were the best fit for the revolution. “On New Democracy” was the how the revolution would be done, who would be included and who would not. It was the outline of the future that would touch the minds of every peasant, worker, and intellectual involved with the revolution.

The essay opens with a caution to the intellectual youth about the dangers of other ideals that might creep into their minds. In the face of multiple competing political strategies, from the KMT and the Stalinists, he asks “what is to be done?”<sup>61</sup> He provides the intellectuals with *Chinese Culture* as an answer to their questions a guide for the future. His thesis statement for the whole rest of the essay comes in the second section which is simply titled “We Want to Build a New China,” from this simple heading it is clear that this essay will define the whole movement that is to follow over the next decade.

Mao’s essay then provides all of the details of how his revolution will combine all of the ideas of Marxism with those of the Nationalists to get on great truth. In his mind there must be a combination of the two ideals because pure Marxism will not work in China, but the Nationalist concept of pure capitalism will only lead to the suffering of the masses.<sup>62</sup> He solution is that the government will control all large means of production in national factories, industries, and farming facilities in order to make sure that each person gets their needs met. However “the republic will neither confiscate capitalist private property in general nor forbid the development of such... as does not ‘dominate the livelihood of the people’.”<sup>63</sup> This meant that there was room for capitalist development in the new China, but it would not be allowed to run the country as had been seen in the West.

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<sup>61</sup> Mao Zedong, *On New Democracy* (January 1940), in *The Wisdom of Mao* (New York: Citadel Press, 1968), 91.

<sup>62</sup> Sil, interview, May 21, 2009.

<sup>63</sup> Mao, *Democracy*, 104.

Furthermore, he leaves some groups out of the revolution. The large land owners have no place in Mao's new China. Their land would be confiscated and redistributed to their peasants or held by the state as communal farms. This makes sense along the lines of a Marxist revolution like that of the Bolsheviks, but he also says that there is no room for hard-line Marxists. This is probably because he does not view the hard-line Marxists as being interested in the Chinese people. His "sinification" of Marxist views combined Chinese cultural heritage with the new revolutionary concept of Marx and this he believed was the most complete answer for China.<sup>64</sup>

Also, in this work Mao defines several sets of revolutionary classes. Each one has its own style of rule. The one that Mao brings to light in China is that of a democratic dictatorship that is ruled by a combination of the revolutionary classes. These classes in China's case were the peasants, the proletariat, the intelligentsia, and the minor bourgeoisie which would combine to create an effective ruling class until such time as that dictatorship was no longer needed at which point government would no longer be needed.<sup>65</sup> This idea of the eventual elimination of a ruling government ties back into the Anarchist movement of the first two decades of the twentieth century. Mao was making the statement that the "New Democracy" would be merely a stage between pre-revolutionary China and his utopian vision, finally Maoism was born.

## IX

At the end of World War II, the Communist force controlled most of the territory vacated by the Japanese, since they had been engaged in most of the fighting. As the Russian forces that had moved into the area during the war they had captured much Japanese weaponry which they turned over to their Chinese comrades. This gave the Communist army not only area from which they had already

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<sup>64</sup> Dirlik, *Marxist*, 97.

<sup>65</sup> Sil, interview, May 21, 2009.

been organizing and recruiting, but arms with which to defend it.<sup>66</sup> The Russian Communists were not thrilled with the way that Mao was running his potential revolution, but at the same time did not want to have a capitalist, Western friendly nation along a border as long as China's.

In August of 1945 the Communist and Nationalist would meet in order to try and come to peaceable terms. This conference saw the huge chasm between the Nationalist ideals and Communist ideals come to the forefront. Neither party saw any reason to compromise on their philosophies and so the conference without a resolution to the tension. The result of which was almost immediate fighting. With the CCP controlling many of the resources and industries that the Japanese had moved into Manchuria, they were able to develop a steady supply base.<sup>67</sup>

Mao's social and political philosophies were now in the hands of CCP leaders and agents all over China. This meant that as his mobile army move throughout the country they were constantly being bolstered with new recruits.<sup>68</sup> While Mao's revolution involving massive peasant support did not garner the approval of the Comintern liaisons they could not argue with the results. The Nationalist, while they had the support of the upper class and many of the Western nations, including America who was hoping for a Western friendly ally against Russia, they could not seem to rally the support of the peasant masses. This was probably because the Communists had been at work with the peasants for many years by the time that the war broke out.<sup>69</sup>

In the end, the war would end up in the hands of the Communists, to prosecute as they would. With the pain of the all too recent purges of CCP from the KMT in their minds the generals of Mao were

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<sup>66</sup> Patricia Stranahan, "Radicalization of Refugees: Communist Party Activity in Wartime Shanghai's Displaced Persons Camps," *Modern China*, vol. 26 (2000): 178.

<sup>67</sup> Victor Shiu Chiang Cheng, "Imagining China's Madrid in Manchuria: The Communist Military Strategy at the Onset of the Chinese Civil War, 1945-1946," *Modern China*, vol. 31 (2005): 110.

<sup>68</sup> Harold T. Tanner, "Guerilla, Mobile, and Base Warfare in Communist Military Operations in Manchuria, 1945-1947," *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 67 (2003): 1203.

<sup>69</sup> Chang Liu, "Making Revolution in Jiangnan: Communists and the Yangzi Delta Countryside, 1927-1945," *Modern China*, vol. 29 (2003): 34.



brutal in their waging of the war.<sup>70</sup> The war was made even more violent because of the oppressed masses that participated. The KMT had set up no programs for these people, instead focusing on development of capitalism and nationalism, while the CCP had focused almost exclusively on the values of the peasants and low-level working class.<sup>71</sup>

The eventual victory of the Communists came very quickly after the complete capture of Manchuria in 1948. The Americans had tried to negotiate a peace between the two aggressors, without any avail in 1947 and again in early 1948. Now with no hope for a non-Communist state in China the Americans quickly lumped the People's Republic of China in with all of the other Communist countries. Russian worried about the type of ideology that had been developed by Mao retained a relationship with the new Republic, but never fully trusted Mao. His ideas were too impure to be qualified as Marxist in their eyes, but at the same time they could not afford to make enemies with a country claiming their same ideals. China now found itself isolated from most of the world, especially the West.

## X

In 1949, after the successful prosecution of his revolution, Mao wrote prolifically about the future of the Chinese state. Maoism would begin to change over the next decade, but in this year we can see a picture of Mao the successful revolutionary, full of hope for the future. His statement to the people would reassure them that he still had their best interest in mind and unlike Stalin he would not become a dictator. In June of 1949 he still held to his utopian idea of a world without government, but was also very pragmatic in his dealing with the people:

“Don’t you want to abolish state power?” Yes, we do, but not right now; we cannot do it yet. Why? Because imperialism still exists, because domestic reaction still exists, because classes still exist in our country. Our present task is to strengthen the people’s state

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<sup>70</sup> Frederick C. Towes, “Mao and His Lieutenants,” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, vol. 19/20 (1988): 13.

<sup>71</sup> Bedeski, “Evolution,” 567.

apparatus—mainly the people’s army, the people’s police and the people’s courts—in order to consolidate national defense and protect the people’s interests.<sup>72</sup>

To the people of China having just endured decades of struggle toward consolidation of their nation and of political power, this message must have seemed like the building blocks to stability. With the revolution over the rebuilding of their country could begin and eventually they would reach their utopia along with Mao’s vision.

Mao’s vision of Marxism was unique. Maoism separated China from the Western world as the revolution progressed. One by one the potential allies of the CCP peeled off pulling support from the party, but never managing to destroy it. The early Anarchist movement was absorbed by the more successful Communist movement. The Russian Marxists disliked Mao because of his elevation of the peasants and refusal to follow the advice of the Comintern. The CCP split with the KMT over political ideology, the CCP following Marxist ideals, the KMT more for a capitalist system. And finally, the violence of the Chinese Civil War, along with the new fear of spreading Communism alienated China because of the title chosen for their government.

The “sinification” of Marxism allowed Mao to maintain popular support for his ideals even with all of this opposition. His ability to relate Marxist ideology with traditional Chinese values made his concepts more valid to his people. Because he phrased his teaching in a way that all people could understand he gained support from both the educated and the commoner. While Mao may have isolated his country from the rest of the world, his ideals gave the population hope to regain their traditions while moving forward into a modern world.

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<sup>72</sup> Mao Tse-tung, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, ed. Stuart R. Schram (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1967) 20.

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